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4. THE MALABAR SPINY DORMOUSE *PLATACANTHOMYS LASIURUS* IN MUDUMALAI WILDLIFE SANCTUARY, TAMIL NADU

The Malabar spiny dormouse *Platacanthomys lasiurus* has been reported by Prabhakar (1997) in the Indira Gandhi Wildlife Sanctuary, Tamil Nadu at 650 m; Ganesh (1997) in the Kalakad Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve, Tamil Nadu at 1,100 m; Sankar (1996) in Upper Bhavani Hills at 2,000 m and also by Jayson and Christopher (1995) in Peppara Wildlife Sanctuary, Kerala at 600 m elevation.

The Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary is situated in Nilgiri district, Tamil Nadu (11° 32'-11° 43' N; 76° 22'-76° 45' E), with an altitude range of 350-1,266 m above msl. It bears vegetation types varying from Moist Deciduous and Semi-evergreen in the Benne forest, through Dry Deciduous Forest over most of the Sanctuary to Dry Thorn in Moyar.

The ecology and distribution of small

mammals in the different habitats of Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary, was studied in 1997. Small mammals were trapped in Sherman traps placed on the ground in the chosen study grids, baited with coconut. The Malabar spiny dormouse was recorded at an elevation of 1,000 m in the semi-evergreen forest of Benne, in May. One individual was captured, preserved and later identified. Its morphometric measurements were: head-body

length 12.6 cm; tail length 13.5cm; hind foot length 2.5 cm; weight 82g (live individual).

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5. THE WILD ELEPHANT *ELEPHAS MAXIMUS* IN MIZORAM

(With a text-figure)

The Asian elephant *Elephas maximus* Linn. is distributed in northeastern India in 14 discrete populations (Choudhury 1999). The populations in Mizoram and Tripura were treated as a single one, with probable movement through Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh. A field trip was made in April 2000 (for 14 days) to assess the status of elephants in Mizoram. During this trip, all the known sites were visited and the Forest Department officials, local hunters/poachers and other tribal villagers were interviewed. The state of Mizoram (21° 58'-24° 30' N, 92° 16'-93° 25' E) (area 21,081 sq. km) (Fig. 1) was referred to in the past as the Lushai Hills of southern Assam. The entire area is hilly, being part of the Himalaya-Arakan mountain chain. The terrain is dissected mostly by north-south flowing rivers, which make a series of parallel ranges. The highest ranges are towards east with Phawngpui or Blue Mountain (2,157 m above msl) and Lengtung (2,141 m above msl) peaks. The lowest evaluation is in the riverbeds

near Assam-Mizoram and India-Bangladesh border (less than 100 m above msl).

Till the 1950s, the elephant was widespread all over the state, especially in the north, west and south (source: local reports by villagers, and A. Laskar, S. Laskar, *pers. comm.*). However, it was never common in recent memory, as its meat was relished by all the tribes (Mizo, Lai or Pawi, Mara or Lakher, Bru or Reang, Chakma, and Hmar) and it was regularly hunted. In the 1960s, when insurgency started, modern firearms became easily available, resulting in a phenomenal increase in poaching. At the same time, ivory also became an important target (especially for sale in southeast Asia markets to buy arms). With the gradual increase in human population, the destruction of forest through felling and *jhum* (shifting cultivation) has also increased. By the 1970s, the main elephant strongholds remained only in the western and southern areas, with small populations elsewhere. By 1980s, the northern elephant population was reduced to stray